



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Spring 2013

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!”
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On Jan. 1, 1988, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was born. As you gather for your synod assembly, may our 25th anniversary year become the occasion to look back with gratitude to God and look to the future with hope in Christ. Our anniversary theme, “Always being made new,” is God’s promise in Christ Jesus.

How would you describe the past 25 years of life and service together as the ELCA? These words come to mind:

- Continuity** We are a church deeply rooted in the faith that is shared with every generation. Our faith is the Holy Spirit’s work through the gospel. It is formed and nourished in worship, strengthened through prayer and study, lived out in our varied daily callings and is often tested. We are a church rooted in Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, tradition and in the rich histories of congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.
- Change** How can we begin to summarize the pace of change these past 25 years? The capacity to be connected through technology is mind-boggling. The tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, gave us a sense of vulnerability and fear. The U.S. religious landscape is dominated by religious pluralism, the growth of “nones” – people with no religious affiliation – and perspectives on social, economic and political issues that are passionate and often polarizing.
- As the ELCA, we have grown in multiple ways and we continue to be transformed by the global body of Christ. We have six full communion partner churches and have adopted 11 social statements. The actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly on human sexuality brought joy and new possibilities for ministry for some and caused painful conflicts and separation for others. What began as a five-year initiative designed to encourage members, congregations and synods to become fluent in the language of Scripture, continues today as we are a “Book of Faith” church. We have created a constellation of worship resources with “Evangelical Lutheran Worship” as our core resource, accompanied by “Prayer Book for

Armed Services,” “Libro de Liturgia y Cántico,” “This Far by Faith” and the “Chinese Lutheran Book of Worship.”

Challenges

There are challenges before us that could cause us to turn inward and become preoccupied with the future of the various parts of the ELCA. Among these are loss of baptized membership; congregations with decreasing resources; ELCA membership that is 95 percent white and where the median age of an ELCA member is about 16 years older than the U.S. population; and financial challenges facing ELCA-related ministries, institutions and agencies, including our seminaries. While these challenges are serious, within them we also find hope as they call us to renewed commitment to work together with imagination, passion and courage.

Commitments

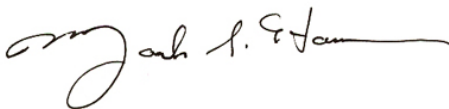
Anniversaries are wonderful opportunities to renew our commitments to one another as we proclaim Christ and engage in God’s mission for the life of the world. Together, let us be a church that:

- Supports all the baptized, as we live out our varied callings to be disciples of Jesus Christ in our daily lives;
- Serves the gospel – through vibrant new and renewed congregations;
- Gives a clear evangelical Lutheran witness to the gospel, building upon the strong foundation of the ongoing Lutheran Reformation;
- Prepares wise, courageous, imaginative and diverse evangelical leaders to serve in church and society;
- Deepens and extends our global and ecumenical partnerships as we serve God’s mission of restoring community and reconciling relationships;
- Welcomes all with radical hospitality, while confronting the barriers of attitudes and action that exclude people from full participation in church and society; and
- Grows generous and faithful stewards of God’s abundant gifts.

We are the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God’s grace. For us, this faith comes through the good news of Jesus Christ and gives us the freedom to boldly participate in God’s work in the world for our next 25 years together.

Thank you for your partnership, gifts and ministry in proclaiming God’s reconciliation in Christ. May the Holy Spirit bless you as we live and serve together, trusting in God’s baptismal promises.

In God’s grace,



Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop